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AUTHOR Williams, Marium T.
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of an action-research study that examined the characteristics of schools in eastern Kentucky that were recognized as effective by the State Department of Education. Eighteen students who were in an educational leadership class at Morehead State University, and who held teaching or administrative positions in Kentucky public schools, conducted interviews with 63 educators from 20 effective schools. The study utilized a constructivist approach described by Egon Guba (1989)--a hermeneutic dialectic process that allows interaction between the people being studied and those conducting the study. Specifically, the study looked at the status of academics, teacher collaboration, school-based decision making, and discipline in the schools. Data indicate that the schools fit the profile described in effective-schools literature. The majority of the schools were rural and elementary and served economically disadvantaged students. They also featured small classes and an average student body of 190 students. Findings indicate that goal congruence was the greatest predictor of school success, and that effective schools were perceived as workplaces that provided autonomy and involvement in educational decisions. Suggestions for improving future course action-research projects are offered. Five tables are included. (Contains 17 references.) (LMI)

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Running head: SCHOOLS AS CENTER OF INQUIRY

An Action Research Project:

The School as Center of Inquiry

Marium T. Williams, Ed.D.

Morehead State University

Morehead, KY 40351

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An Action Research Project:

The School as Center of Inquiry

Introduction

This Research for School Leaders class at Morehead State University consisted of teachers and administrators currently employed in Eastern Kentucky public schools.

These graduate students wanted to study schools in Eastern Kentucky designated as effective by the state department of education. These schools had recently received monetary rewards for their schools and each teacher received approximately $2,000.00. These "effective schools" had reached or surpassed goals (cognitive and non-cognitive) set by the state. This class was interested in determining the status of academics, teacher collaboration, site based decision making and discipline in these reward schools. Were these components of effective schools (Edmonds, 1979; Goodlad, 1982; Purkey and Smith, 1983; Glickman, 1989; Austin and Reynolds, 1990) in place in these state designated effective schools?

The class studied a summary of effective schools research in the 70's, 80's and 90's. Each special interest group was validated in seeing its study

area designated as an effective component. In these studies, academics, collaboration, site-based management and discipline were often mentioned.

The research approach was to be a constructivist one as described by Egon Guba (1989) using his hermeneutic dialectic process which allows for much interaction between ones who study and those studied. Many of the class were from "reward schools". Their responses were not tallied. Yet their design was applied to their own reward schools personnel.

The class also studied action research (Perry-Sheldon, 1987) materials. Students again felt validated that this type of research was in good repute with a cadre of scholar-educators.

Effective Schools Overview and Survey of Academics

Purpose

The purpose of this survey was to obtain information on a sampling of the reward/effective schools within Region 7 of Kentucky.

Design and Procedure

The interviews were conducted June 22-26, 1995, either by telephone, or in person. Respondents were encouraged to make additional comments, and these were recorded on the questionnaire form.

The EDIL 621 class met on June 26, 1995 to compile and analyze data. Students were divided into groups, with each group being assigned a specific focus area from the questionnaire.

Subjects

A total of 63 educators were interviewed from 20 different schools. Each interviewee worked at a reward/effective school within Region 7 of Kentucky. Demographics are provided in the table below:

Table 1

An Overview of Effective Schools Research

There are characteristics associated with effective schools, based on the research of the late Ronald R. Edmonds (1979), a Harvard University professor whom many consider a founder of the movement.

In the early 1970's, Mr. Edmonds and others set out to identify inner-city schools where children beat the odds, breaking the link between poverty and low achievement. They identified several features that these "effective schools" shared:

1. A well-articulated school mission or academic focus;
2. Frequent monitoring of student progress;
3. Strong instructional leadership from principals;
4. Teachers who exhibit expectations that all students can achieve at high levels:
5. A safe, orderly climate for learning; and
6. Positive relations between home and school.

Over the years, numerous studies have been done to determine the characteristics of an effective school. The findings of some of the more recent studies are consistent with the early research. Other researchers have reported

findings that modify, expand, or even contradict descriptions of effective schools reported in the 1970's.

In the 1980's, John Goodlad surveyed 1,350 teachers, 18,000 students, 8,600 parents, and all the principals, superintendents, and school board members in these schools--and after 5,000 classroom observations, he drew these conclusions:

1. The greatest predictor of school success was goal congruence among teachers, administrators, students and parents.
2. The staff in successful schools had little concern about violence, discipline, and management; instead, their concern was with the school's educational priorities.
3. Effective schools were perceived as work places that provided autonomy as well as involvement in educational decisions.
4. Teachers in successful schools spent more time on instruction, and students spent more time on learning tasks.

5. There was little difference in actual techniques and methods of teaching between successful and unsuccessful schools.

After reviewing research and literature on effective schools, educational innovation, and school organization, Purkey and Smith (1983) concluded that effective schools were characterized by the following:

1. Site-based management;
2. Strong leadership either from the administration or a group of teachers;
3. Staff stability (infrequent transfers);
4. A well-planned and coordinated curriculum;
5. On-going, school-wide staff development;
6. Parental involvement and support;
7. School-wide recognition and academic success;
8. Maximized learning time;
9. Support from the district office;
10. Collaborative planning and colleagial relationships;
11. Sense of community;

12. Clear goals and high expectations commonly shared; and
13. Order and discipline.

Finally, after reviewing what they refer to as a "second wave" of effective schools research generated in a number of countries, Austin and Reynolds (1990) reported the following characteristics of effective schools:

1. Site management;
2. Leadership;
3. Curriculum and instructional articulation and organization;
4. Staff stability;
5. Staff development;
6. Maximized learning time;
7. Widespread recognition of academic success;
8. Parental involvement and support;
9. Collaborative planning and collegial relationships;
10. Sense of community;
11. Clear goals and expectations commonly shared; and

12. Order and discipline.

A Focus on Academics

The focus on the academics, curriculum and instructional goals were repeated in different forms within all research.

Table Two

Research Questions

The academics study group surveyed teachers on:

1. Well-planned curriculum (Purkey and Smith, 1983; Austin and Reynolds, 1990);
2. Focus on instruction (Edmonds, 1979; Goodlad, 1982; Purkey and Smith, 1983; Austin and Reynolds, 1990);
3. Clear goals (Edmonds, 1979; Goodlad, 1982; Purkey and Smith, 1983; Austin and Reynolds, 1990);

4. School-wide focus and recognition of academic success (Edmonds, 1979; Goodlad, 1982; Purkey and Smith, 1983; Austin and Reynolds, 1990);
5. Variety of teaching strategies (not mentioned in above studies);
6. Positive parent involvement (Edmonds, 1979; Goodlad, 1982 ; Purkey and Smith, 1983; Austin and Reynolds, 1990).

Research Results

1. Of the 63 respondents surveyed, 56 (90.5%) indicated their school had a well-planned and coordinated curriculum.
2. Fifty-eight (92%) indicated that their curriculum focused on intellectually challenging instruction.
3. Fifty-nine (94%) indicated there are clear goals and high expectations for students, faculty, staff, and administration.
4. Fifty-eight (94%) indicated that there was school-wide recognition of academic success.

5 Sixty (95%) indicated that in their schools alternative teaching strategies were provided to students having difficulty.

6. Forty-seven (74%) indicated that parents were involved in the academic success of students. This item in the survey received the most negative response. Sixteen (26%) indicated there was not enough parent support. Overall comments indicated that successful students have positive parental support.

These responses indicate that the reward schools in Kentucky fit well the profile on academics outlined by many effective schools researchers. There was a 90% or better fit on all the items on academics and the "within school indicators" of researchers. More parent involvement in academics is needed in the perception of these administrators.

Collaboration

Education reform is occurring extensively across the nation. Many of the current reforms request expansive, purposeful teacher collaboration. Several effective researchers have determined that teacher collaboration is an

element of effectiveness (Purkey and Smith, 1983; Austin and Reynolds, 1990; Gonzalez, 1991; Lugg and Boyd, 1993; Johnson and Johnson, 1993; Heller, 1993; Raywid, 1993). Therefore these questions were posed to teachers and administrators from reward schools.

1. All teachers are expected to work collaboratively in order to alter the curriculum, correlate subjects, and pursue new relationships between the school and the real world.
2. Title I and regular classroom teachers collaborate.
3. Planning time is available to facilitate collaboration.
4. Teachers share responsibility for students' learning.
5. Teachers feel that collaboration is effective.
6. Teachers across the district collaborate with each other.

Table 3

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1. Thirty-eight (60%) agreed that collaboration is in place among all teachers within their school.
2. Forty-three educators (68%) responded that collaboration among Title I and regular classroom teachers is taking place. The extent of time spent collaborating with each was not noted. These responses indicate that educators are making an effort to collaborate even if they must do so on their own time (see item 6).
3. Thirty-three teachers (52%) responded that they have common planning time at regular intervals. This indicates educators are aware of the need to collaborate; however, after five years of implementation of education reform, 52% could be viewed as a low percentage of teachers who have a schedule that facilitates collaboration.
4. Twenty-eight of the respondents (44%) indicated that Title I teachers and classroom teachers were equally responsible for students' learning, time,

investment and accountability. The collaboration may be valued by 60%, but this factor may indicate ambiguity in understanding "Who is responsible?".

5. More than half (59%) of the participants feel that collaboration is an effective means of teaching. Students, teachers, administrators, and the district as a whole, profit from colleagiality. Teachers who have worked together see substantial improvements in student achievement, behavior, and attitude (Johnson and Johnson, 1993).

6. The survey results on district-wide collaboration indicated that 21 (33%) of the educators responded that teachers working in the same disciplines are given time to collaborate. This seems to validate the findings in Number 5 that more facilitation opportunities for collaboration should be implemented by the administration.

A statistical note of interest is 59% of the educators surveyed feel collaboration is an effective means of teaching in comparison to 60% of educators who agree collaboration is in place among all teachers. This indicates that schools focusing on incorporating collaboration among colleagues feel it is a productive, effective use of time. This sort of interaction appears necessary to continuing growth and improvement in the individual as well as to sustaining a good school (Wildman and Niles, 1987).

Discipline

Discipline is another component mentioned in many effective schools reports under terms such as environment (Edmonds, 1979; Purkey and Smith, 1983; Austin and Reynolds, 1990).

Table 4

Discipline Questions

These questions focused on:

1. Does the school have a school-wide policy?
2. Do teachers help develop policy?
3. Do students help develop policy?

4. Does community help develop the policy?

5. Does the school paddle?

6. How do these educators rate punishments?

In this section on discipline, 95% of these educators perceived the school-wide discipline policy as effective. They also perceived that teachers were effectively involved in developing that policy.

However, the students were involved in this discipline policy development to a much lesser degree (35%) as perceived by these educators. There are many elementary schools (76%) included in this study. This may contribute to the traditional tendency not to include students in discipline policy development.

It is surprising that the community was only perceived as having an effective voice in policy development by 69% of the educators. State guidelines for many years have suggested community involvement as well as the later reform initiative to involve parents more in schools' policies (i.e. site based decision-making is mandated). But 69% does indicate that effort is being made to share decision-making with parents.

Even more surprising is the 45% of these educators who work in schools that still use corporal punishment. State recommendations to ban

corporal punishment for the past ten years have not succeeded in eliminating this practice. More elementary schools than high schools were studied by these students. Traditionally, elementary schools in Kentucky have used corporal punishment more than the high schools.

The perceptions of these educators (53%) indicate that they support the use of corporal punishment. The effective use of classroom rules seems to be the form of punishment most of these educators (87%) favored. Therefore, discipline through a more basic classroom approach indicates a disposition to prevent rather than punish by harsher means such as suspension, expulsion and paddling.

This traditional view of order occurs in schools research (Edmonds, 1979; Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweiter, and Wisenbaker, 1979; Purkey and Smith, 1983; Austin and Reynolds, 1990). Yet, in some studies such as Edmonds (1979) and Rutter, Maughan, Mortimer, Ouston, and Smith (1979), order and discipline in their research was not rigid nor was much punishment used.

The perceptions of these educators seems to suggest that the discipline in these reward schools may be in transition to a less punishment approach.

Site-Based Decision Making Councils

The Groundwork

The establishment of SBDM councils allows the stakeholders in the school environment to make the school more representative of their thoughts, morals, and values. However, many people are not certain about the need for councils. To help calm the fears of the public, Baim and Dimperio (1994) suggest the following cautions:

1. All staff members must be convinced that they have a vested interest in the school and the council. Everyone must participate in the site-based governance.
2. Principals must realize that the council can enhance their roles and is not meant to take away all their power.
3. Councils must be trained in making priority judgements. The councils must know what decisions should be tackled and not try to solve every problem in the school. They also need to

know that contract issues are not the domain of the council.

4. The council must have the support of the building principal. The principal must be a willing member of the council. He/she must be able to work well with others and still be able to run the day-to-day decisions of the school (Neal, 1995).

School-based decision making (SBDM) councils are a mandate in the state of Kentucky by the fall of 1996 except for reward schools who may decide to be exempt. Eighty percent of the reward schools studied here were already SBDM schools. Research indicates in several effective schools studies that SBDM is often a component of successful schools (Purkey and Smith, 1983; Stedman, 1987; Austin and Reynolds, 1990).

SBDM Questions

These questions probed the attitudinal and environmental aspects of SBDM.

1. What is support for SBDM from the superintendent's office?
2. What is support of faculty?

3. Is the SBDM committee making policy?

4. Is it dwelling on grievances?

5. Is the committee organization vital?

6. Are individuals in favor of SBDM?

7. Do faculties favor SBDM?

Table 5

SUMMARY OF SITE-BASED DECISION MAKING DATA

Sixty-three school employees (administrators and teachers) in Region 7 and two in Region 8 were surveyed. However, only 49 of those surveyed were from SBDM schools therefore, there is a smaller number of respondents than in the rest of the study.

Questions concerning support for SBDM councils indicate the following:

1. Forty-four (88%) of those surveyed believed that their school council has the support of the faculty.

2. This same number (44 [88%] respondents) felt that the school council had the support of the central office.

3. Ninety percent indicated that the council makes policy decisions.

4. On 12 respondents (34%) felt that councils spend an inordinate amount of time regarding grievance matters. Although the responses reflected extreme pro-SBDM attitude, and 84% of the respondents said they were personally in favor of SBDM, only 17 respondents (69%) perceived that their faculty was in favor of SBDM. Few respondents answered this question. SBDM may be a component not fully embraced by these schools.

5. Thirty-one respondents (84%) strongly agree or agree that their council makes decisions based on committee recommendations.

Statistics indicate that in Region 7, 66% of all schools are site-based schools. Of the reward schools surveyed in Region 7, 80% were site-based. Despite faculty resistance, there seems to be some indications here that SBDM has characteristics that aid schools in becoming a reward school.

Conclusion

An overview of all these components seems to validate that "reward schools" in Kentucky do fit well the profile that emerges of successful schools in the effective schools research.

Seventy-one percent of these schools are rural. The median size of the schools is 190. The average student population who receives free or reduced lunch is 67.4%. Seventeen students to each teacher is the median ratio of students to teacher. Most of these schools (83%) are elementary schools. Many of these are children of the poor who live in Appalachia but with teachers, administrators and parents working together, they have become Kentucky "reward schools" and in the broad sense of effective schools, they do seem to fit the profile in academics, teacher collaboration, discipline and site-based decision making.

Reflections of the Students and Professor

The purpose of this project was two-fold. One was to make inquiry a comfort zone for these administrators. All of them had graduate experience in the rigorous sort of traditional research proposed by professors. Action research was suggested as a valuable tool for school leaders. In the beginning, few felt comfortable in directing a faculty in research. However, in one student's final reflection she stated "I have come to understand and appreciate action research. I am a member of my school's professional development committee and I plan on recommending this for the next year." This action research focused on teachers' interest and need as a small group and finally, as a large group study. Most of the students saw the value in this type of research. Another student's final reflection was "I have always felt if teachers had more time to review and research, this would impact teaching. Making decisions as teachers and leaders should be based on some foundation, there should be a starting point and this is where action research would be valuable."

The second objective was to encourage the professional perspective that one has a responsibility beyond one's own school to share one's work and perhaps add to the knowledge base of the profession. There was an up-front

commitment that their work would be disseminated in some manner to other professionals.

The professor too learned much from this process. The energy and commitment of the students led to the "arationality" state described by David Berliner (1988). This "arationality" has its costs. My suggestions for such another project are:

1. A clear outline/format closely monitored;
2. A checksheet to ensure raw data is tabulated and reported in a consistent fashion;
3. A midpoint editorial check on the part of the professor--an early editing and an end editing process were not enough to ensure quality.

The process of working collaboratively with others to study, question, read, write, debate, discuss, decide, then act was the experience provided as a model for their leadership and an instructional catalyst. In reflection provided by the students, each one of the 18 students cited the cooperation and colleagality as important components of the class. Several admitted to a hesitance about working as a group but were later drawn to this approach.

This student, as did many others, seemed to internalize the truth of Purkey and Smith's (1983) findings. 1) The greatest predictor of school success was goal congruence. 2) Effective schools were perceived as work places that provided autonomy as well as involvement in educational decisions.

This student speaks of a transformation of perspective that may empower him as an administrator, "Through working with intelligent, well-mannered professionals, I have been restored to an old, higher level of faith and trust in my compatriots. More than any other thing I have learned about effective schools, I have found they are a place where we can work, live, share, care and, if we have to, cry together."

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Table One

Demographics

Total of 17 Schools Surveyed:	Elementary (14)
	Middle Schools (2)
	High Schools (1)
Number of Students in the School:	0-300 (33)
	300-500 (18)
	500-1,000 (11)
	1,000-2,000 (0)
Location of the School:	Rural (45)
	Suburban (16)
	Urban (2)
School has an Assistant Principal:	Yes (14)
	No (48)
School has a Guidance Counselor:	Yes (56)
	No (6)
School has Implemented SBDM:	Yes (48)
	No (14)

School Level:	Elementary (51)
	Middle School (7)
	Secondary (4)
Gender:	Male (25)
	Female (37)
Position:	Administrator (32)
	Teacher (30)

Table Two

Academics

Question		Number of responses 5	4	3	2	1
1.	Your school has a well-planned and coordinated curriculum.	27	29	3	4	0
2.	The curriculum focuses on intellectually challenging instruction.	26	32	2	3	0
3.	There are clear goals and high expectations for students, faculty, staff, and administration.	'31	28	1	3	0
4.	There is school-wide recognition of academic success.	29	27	2	4	1
5.	Alternative teaching strategies are provided to students having difficulty mastering a task.	24	36	3	0	0
6.	Parents are involved in the academic success of students.	15	32	10	6	0

Leikert Scale:

5=strongly agree; 4=agree; 3=undecided; 2=disagree; 1=strongly disagree

Table Three

Collaboration

Question		Number of responses 5	4	3	2	1
1.	Collaboration is in place among all teachers.	17	21	12	9	4
2.	Title I and regular classroom teachers collaborate.	20	23	10	10	0
3.	Common planning times are set aside at regular intervals for collaborating teachers.	15	18	13	10	7
4.	Title I and regular education teachers are equally responsible for student learning, time investment, and accountability.	8	20	14	13	8
5.	Collaborating teachers feel that collaboration is an effective means of teaching.	15	22	15	10	1

6.	Teachers across the district are given time to collaborate with other teachers working in the same areas.	11	10	10	20	21

Table Four

Discipline

Question		Number of responses 5	4	3	2	1
1.	Your school has an effective school-wide discipline policy	26	33	3	0	0
2.	Teachers have an effective voice in developing discipline policy.	28	31	2	0	1
3.	Students have an effective voice in developing discipline policy.	6	16	11	20	9
4.	Community has an effective voice in developing discipline policy.	13	30	11	6	3
5.	Your school uses corporal punishment.	8	20	6	20	9
6.	Rate each of the following insofar as an effective form of punishment:					
	a. Classroom rules	20	34	8	0	0
	b. Detention	20	49	7	6	1
	c. In-school suspension	20	23	13	4	2
	d. Saturday school	12	15	16	12	7

Question		Number of responses				
		5	4	3	2	1
e.	Suspension	14	20	14	10	4
f.	Expulsion	12	18	14	10	8
g.	Corporal punishment	15	18	10	10	9

Table Five

School-based Decision Making

Question		Number of responses 5	4	3	2	1
1.	The SBDM council has the support of the district office.	24	20	2	3	0
2.	The SBDM council has the support of school faculty.	19	24	5	0	1
3.	The SBDM council makes policy decisions.	24	21	3	1	0
4.	The SBDM council spends an inordinate amount of time regarding grievance matters.	2	10	18	11	7
5.	The SBDM council makes decisions based on committee recommendations.	12	19	12	5	0
6.	I am personally in favor of SBDM.	13	19	17	3	1
7.	The faculty is in favor of SBDM.	7	10	5	1	1